

Long Live the King Sermon Series  
#4 – The Tainted Crown  
2 Sam. 11 and 12  
Aug. 13, 2006

Aside from the original sin of Adam and Eve, probably no sin in the Bible is more well-known than David and Bathsheba. That's no necessarily something you want to be well-known for; that's like getting your name in the newspaper – in the police blotter. This doesn't make David any worse of a person than you and me; we're talking about one of the greatest kings in history, not some wild man or social deviant. The only difference between our sins and his is that his were published in the best-selling book of all time. Really, he's no different than us.

Up to this point in the story, David has had nothing but success. He's restored the nation of Israel to peace and has built a formidable military power. His authority now stretched throughout the land, and he was king over many nations. He was king of Judah, of Israel, of the Philistines, the Moabites, the Hittites, the Edomites, the Stalagmites, the Stalagmites, and the Gesundtites. He had it all.

But it wasn't enough for him. How could a man who had everything possibly want more? David was about 50 now, so maybe he was hitting a mid-life crisis. He's started using Rogaine, had a treadmill installed in the royal workout room, eating a lot more bran. Maybe he needed something to help him feel young again. When we stop being happy with what God gave us, we become vulnerable to the things Satan wants to give us.

We should know David's in trouble with the very first verse of this passage. It tells us that spring is the time when kings go off to war, yet David is sending his general Joab to lead the army instead of doing it himself. David, who was created by God to be a great warrior, decides to stop doing what God called him to do. He's neglecting his duties. He's got too much time on his hands. And the devil can always find something for idle hands to do.

So David is walking around on his roof one night and sees a woman bathing herself. Now, David was a passionate man – passionate about serving God, passionate about leading the kingdom, and passionate about his passions. David is the king, he can have anything he wants, and at this moment, staring right into the face of temptation, David decides to not look away. When we make the decision to not turn away, we have to be prepared to face whatever comes of it.

So he asks a man about this woman, and the man says, "Isn't this Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah?" You hear what this man is doing, right? He knows that David is thinking about more than baking a loaf of bread for this neighbor, so he tactfully tries to snap David back to reality. "Yes, King David, that's Bathsheba, Uriah's wife. Uriah is her husband. She's married. To Uriah. He's her husband." But David doesn't hear him. He's already decided to not turn away.

So David brings Bathsheba to the palace and sleeps with her, and she conceives. Now some guys in this situation might panic. But not David. Notice the narrative doesn't pause for an instant. David is a man of action, a problem-solver. He didn't get to where he was without dealing with a few messes. And this situation, this matter of adultery and an unborn child, was merely another problem to be solved. So the coverup begins.

That's usually our first reaction when we do something wrong; we try to cover it up and hope that no one will notice. I once ran my dad's car off the road because I was driving too fast to impress my date, and I damaged the car's bumper. I spent the next three days trying to keep my dad from looking at the front of his car; he was amazed at how much help I needed putting things in the trunk. Then one morning when I woke up my dad said, "Boy, what did you do to my car?" And in a moment of panic I said, "Uh, I wasn't paying attention and I hit a bucket!" As if there are buckets just lying around the roads of Southern Indiana. To this day, I think Dad still believes I hit a bucket.

That's what temptation does to us: the guilt of our wrongdoing causes us to try and cover it up, heaping lie on top of lie until we've dug a hole out of which we can't escape. David's cover-up is especially insidious. If he can get Uriah and Bathsheba to spend a romantic weekend together, Uriah might believe the child was his own. The only problem was that Uriah was out fighting a battle and was sworn to celibacy until the fight was over. David orders him back to Jerusalem and tells him to go show his wife how much he has missed her, but Uriah, being a loyal soldier, refuses to sleep with her.

Then, David tries to get Uriah drunk and sends him home to his wife, but again Uriah refuses to break his solidarity with his fellow soldiers. Finally, David resorts to killing Uriah. He sends him back to the battlefield with a note for Joab to put Uriah on the front lines and then draw away from him, assuring his death.

You see what has happened here? David didn't start out to be a murderer. But his neglecting of his duties led to idleness which led to temptation which led to adultery which led to deceit which led to murder. The passage we read from James spelled it out clearly: "After desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and sin, when it is full-grown, gives birth to death." Most problems don't start all at once; they start a little at a time, but grow to be much more deadly.

Once, at a committee meeting, someone had provided some snacks, including a big bowl of grapes, which was placed very close to me. This is not a good thing. I love grapes. As the meeting started, I ate one, then another, then another. And about halfway through the meeting, I reached for a grape, and they were gone! I had sat there and ate the whole bowl. So I took my napkin and placed it over the bowl – my own version of a cover-up. I didn't plan on eating the whole bowl; I thought I could just eat a few and then stop.

The problem with little sins is that we think they are manageable; we think we can rationalize our way through them. "This is such a little thing, it won't hurt anyone, no one will know, it will only be this once." But the reality is that every time we choose not to be honest with God about a sin, we commit more sins to try and cover it up, furthering our dishonesty, until before we know it, we've sat there and ate the whole bowl of grapes. We didn't plan on it, it just happened that way, and we couldn't stop it.

David finally does break his cycle of sin, thanks to the brave actions of the prophet Nathan, who realizes that for this deception to end, David has to be held accountable. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German theologian who was killed by the Nazis, once said, "Nothing is more cruel than the leniency which abandons others to their sins." The apostle Paul talks about speaking the truth in love to each other. Telling people what they want to hear is not love. When people are engaged in destructive, soul-threatening behavior, they need a mirror. No one sets out to become an adulterer or murderer or

absent parent or closet alcoholic. No one plans these things. But they happen every day. Why? Partly because we have no one in our lives whom we've invited to tell the truth.

We all need someone to hold us accountable. Who is that person for you? And are you that person for someone else? This is delicate, because we have to both speak the truth and speak it in love. John Ortberg says there's a theological distinction between being a prophet and being a jerk. And yet, if we see someone in trouble, and we don't speak the truth, what could happen? James writes, "Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his ways will save him from death."

So Nathan holds up a mirror to David in the form of a parable, and David falls for it hook, line, and sinker. David sticks his head right into the noose and Nathan gives it a pull: "You are the man!" I wonder what went through David's mind at that point. I guess the weight of what he had done finally hit him, and he responds with the words that I believe save his life: "I have sinned against the Lord."

Those are not easy words to say. It means admitting that we're wrong. It means admitting that we've messed up and fallen short. It means swallowing our pride and acknowledging that we have hurt someone else and hurt God. And yet no one has ever come to Christ as anything but a sinner. The only way we accept the forgiveness of Christ is by acknowledging our need for it. No words can bring more healing and reconciliation than those words. "I have sinned against the Lord."

David showed great maturity, albeit too late. A German proverb says, "I grow old too soon and smart too late." Had David been obedient to the will of God on the rooftop, he wouldn't have been disobedient in the bedroom. But, with the help of Nathan, he is finally honest with God. The moment we know we need God's help and say so out loud, God can hear us and find us and bring us home.

Was David a good or bad man? A little bit of both, I guess. If we remember him as a hero, I hope it's not because of Goliath or the psalms or the victories on the battle field. I hope it is because of this moment of honesty, when he stopped covering up and instead uncovered his heart, when he acknowledged who he was and what he had done, and God said, "Come home, child."